

# North Texas Daily

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News

## University Gammas sorority hosts first student-led drag show since pause



Lex Doll performs at first student associated drag show since the pause, part of "Drag Night with the Gammas," on April 11, 2025. Photo by Matthew Winter

By Matthew Winter  
Deputy News Editor

A venue full of cheering audience members met the drag queens and kings part of the first student-affiliated drag performance since the pause to comply with University System Chancellor Michael Williams' directive.

Led by university students on April 11 at Andersons Eatery and

Distillery, "Drag Night with the Gamma's," featured six university-affiliated performers, despite its near cancellation.

On March 28, Williams directed all university campus presidents to halt any drag shows performed in state-funded facilities and on campuses.

However, the sorority Sigma Lambda Gamma, or the "Gammas," did not cancel their show, choosing instead

to continue their event as planned – this time approximately 1.5 miles from campus.

"We were very disappointed and upset, but there's nothing we really could do," said Melody Caballero, marketing freshman and the Gammas' cultural awareness chair. "It was out of our hands and luckily, there were people who reached out to us, felt for us and saw that we were not [going to be able to have] our show within two weeks before our show, and they were like, we can help you."

Lucky Lou's, a Fry Street bar, and Andersons reached out to the Gammas to offer their businesses as venues for the show.

The theme for the night was the 2010s, featuring popular songs from that time, and earlier, such as "What Makes You Beautiful," (2011) by One Direction and Fall Out Boy's "Sugar, We're Going Down" (2005) intercut with viral vine clips, among other tracks.

The show also included facts about the history of drag.

"This event is to get the Greek community out and comfortable with

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Arts & Life

## The Fine Arts Series hosts iconic 'The Office' star Leslie David Baker

By Ismael Beltran  
Senior Photographer

"Come on in and sit in the cheap seats in the back," Leslie David Baker said with a smirk as students entered the sold-out Lyceum Theater on April 9. Best known as Stanley Hudson from NBC's show "The Office," Baker headlined the semester's final show of the Mary Jo & V. Lane Rawlins Fine Arts Series.

Baker, who starred in "The Office" for all nine seasons, spoke about his career, experiences and views on life and success. His humor and laid-back style resonated with students, who enjoyed his stories and asked questions during a Q&A.

"I had to drive an hour to get here, but it was totally worth it," said Josue Bermudez, a mechanical engineering sophomore at the University of Texas at Arlington. "Seeing Leslie David Baker in person was a dream come true. I never thought I'd get to meet someone from one of my favorite shows."

Bermudez, wearing a Stanley Hudson shirt, described "The Office" as his "favorite show in the world," and one he has watched at least twelve times.



Actor Leslie David Baker speaks about his education experience during his talk for UNT's Distinguished Lecture Series on April 9, 2025. Photo by Ismael Beltran

"The Office" is a mockumentary-style sitcom that aired on NBC from 2005 to 2013, gaining a massive following for its dry humor, quirky characters and fictional workplace scenarios.

Set in Scranton, Pennsylvania, the sitcom follows the story of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company and the daily lives of office employees through meetings in the conference room, office romances and other memorable instances in between, all captured by a

documentary film crew. Among the characters was Hudson, a grumpy salesman with a desire for crossword puzzles and pretzel day. He is known for his expressions and consistent lack of enthusiasm for almost everything.

The Lyceum was packed from top to bottom with students arriving early to secure a seat near the front. Medical laboratory sciences junior Lindsey Rodriguez was one of them,

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Sports



Senior quarterback Reese Poffenbarger prepares for a passing drill during the first day of spring camp at the Lovelace & McNatt Families Practice Facility on March 18, 2025. Photo by Ismael Beltran

## Spring season comes to an end as portal opens

Justin Na & Ruben Placencia  
Sports Editor/Senior Sports Writer

North Texas football will now close its doors until the summer as the team concludes its 15-practice-long spring season that spanned the last two months.

Based on their time together, head coach Eric Morris believes the team is much deeper than last season's roster and will be able to add more to their backup depth when the spring transfer portal opens on April 16.

That same portal will allow current university players to enter, including former junior running back Damashja Harris, senior safety Isheem Young and junior linebacker Chavez Brown, who already announced their decisions on social media.

Morris said he and the team will continue planning their strategy for the second window, but he also gave his thoughts on all the obstacles that come with the window for players navigating the college football landscape.

"The bad thing about the second portal window is people get desperate [...] and then some kid gets themselves in some bad situation where they're not going to be on the field somewhere and it just is what it is [...]," Morris said. "I think everybody's happy that we're paying these kids [...] but the fact is that it's just an open market and these agents are involved in shopping kids and this

sport's just not pure anymore."

The Mean Green will look to specifically add to their linebacker, wide receiver, safety and interior defensive-line rooms in search of competitive depth. With the player departures in the spring across the country, Morris described the continuous roster rebuilding in the second window as a "moving target."

Notably, the running back room will not be in a position of need to enter the transfer window, despite Harris entering the portal. Last season, he ran for 193 yards on 22 attempts in three games before he sustained a season-ending injury.

With five running backs heading into the summer, Morris said Harris became the odd man out.

"It's just a thing where we were able to replace some guys," Morris said. "We've got some guys back and we just didn't have a scholarship for him right now. [I am] thankful for him coming in here and working his tail off and being able to give us some reps last year."

Instead, other new and familiar names will look to take North Texas' leading rusher title that was filled by another transfer, junior running back Shane Porter, last year. Last season, he recorded 643 yards on 95 carries and five touchdowns.

Morris spoke about each running back on the roster this spring, starting

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North Texas Daily

Editorial Team

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Chris Moss  
@chrismoss808

Managing Editor

Gianna Ortner-Findlay  
@giannae.ortner\_reports

Design Editor

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@givanacamera

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@\_xiden

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Copyeditor

Samantha Heath  
@samdoesjournalism

Faculty Advisor

Randy Loftis  
940-565-3495 // Randy.Loftis@unt.edu

Account Executive

Rich Edmond  
214-793-3066 // Richard.Edmond@unt.edu

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Students forced to relocate drag show off campus

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the uncomfortable,” Caballero said. “I want them to get used to this type of lifestyle [...] because I don’t think that every community is being expressed or shown as it used to be.”

Williams said in the directive that the university must comply with all applicable federal and state laws since it is a public institution.

“UNT wanted to send the message that they won’t cause trouble and that they will comply excessively with anything that the government wants,” said drag performer Scorpio Fakename, who prefers to be identified by their stage name. “It’s important to those who don’t have power in society to not give up the ground that they have and to not be bullied by people with power.”

Scorpio Fakename, a psychology freshman, was scheduled to perform at the on-campus show and performed at Andersons.

“All forms of art are equally important,” Scorpio Fakename said. “The ability to make art of any value, whether it’s good or bad, is important to the human experience, because art is more about communicating.”

The host of the night, Crissy MF Cross, who prefers to be identified by their stage name, is a member of the Sigma Lambda Beta fraternity and a graduate student. Crissy MF Cross described drag as being a safe

place for them and many others. They said it gives them a place to express themselves, be creative and be who they are.

“Growing up in a very conservative Catholic family, it was hard for me to just express fashion, and I really loved fashion,” Crissy MF Cross said. “It gives us a community of queer people who are safe and loving and supportive no matter what.”

According to the directive, the pause will remain until definitive rulings from other Texas universities are issued. The university is not the first to limit drag performances on Texas campuses.

The Texas A&M Queer Empowerment Council filed a lawsuit against the Texas A&M Board of Regents on March 24 after they voted to ban drag shows on its campus on Feb. 28, according to an article from The Battalion. The court granted a preliminary injunction that barred the BOR from enforcing its ban, which allowed the annual “Draggieland” to occur on campus on March 27.

“The whole point of drag is queer liberation and queer education to all people,” Crissy MF Cross said. “A lot of people think drag is very sexual in nature, which could be true. But just because one show happens to be that way doesn’t mean every single show is that way. We have drag queens, kings, preachers and entertainers in general—it’s just to show art,

and I’m glad that I’m still able to showcase my art, even though UNT decided to ban the show.”

Many attendees, such as fashion design sophomore Betasida Rodriguez, came out to support their friends performing in the show.

“Drag means a lot of things, like identity and representation of the queer community, and also just having fun,” Rodriguez said. “[My friend] made his own outfit, he borrowed my sewing machine to make it, [...] like we’re a school of new opportunities. It was already all organized ,and to see it all canceled, it’s like dang, all his hard work.”

Many performers stressed how long and time-consuming preparing for the show is, making the two weeks’ notice for the pause difficult for them.

“There’s a lot that goes into all performances, but specifically this drag performance, because we’ve been rehearsing a group number for months, so canceling it at the last minute, giving us the least amount of time to recover and switch gears was not unintentional,” Scorpio Fakename said. “[The organizer] has done, like, an amazing job of preparing us for that and being like, yeah, there’s a chance that this might get canceled.”

At the time of writing, there is no update on when or if drag shows will be resumed on campus.



Lex Doll performs at first student associated drag show since the pause, part of “Drag Night with the Gammas,” on April 11, 2025. Photo by Matthew Winter

AAUP sends letter to university administration regarding recent student visa revocations

By Hannah Everett  
Senior News Editor

The University of North Texas’ American Association of University Professors chapter sent a letter to University President Harrison Keller and the university administration urging them to take action after 27 students had their visas revoked.

The letter, sent on April 12, follows actions taken by the Department of Homeland Security against students at universities across the country and the Department of Justice’s investigation into the university for alleged antisemitism.

“We are worried about the potential short term and long term impacts to the academic futures of the 27 students as well as the rippling effects on our campus community,” the members of the university AAUP chapter said in the letter.

Faculty Senate Vice-Chair William Joyner read out an email during the April 9 Faculty Senate meeting in which the university Provost Michael McPherson

said 16 international students have had their Student and Exchange Visitor Information System records – a database used by the Department of Homeland Security to maintain information about student visas – dissolved since January.

The university later told the *North Texas Daily* that the number of students who had lost visas had risen to 27, but did not provide a timeline for when the revocations began.

The DOJ launched an investigation into the university in late March for alleged antisemitism. The university has not released information as to what the alleged antisemitic action on campus was, nor has the DOJ at the time of writing.

The letter says the “absence of communication or any form of instruction” from the university administration is “worrisome” and urges that support be extended to international students. The letter links to a petition, sponsored by the university’s chapter of the Young Democratic Socialists of America, which asks the administration to communicate “explicit protocols and procedures” relevant to ICE action on campus and currently has 1,486 signatures.

On April 2, the AAUP wrote a letter to the Offices of General Counsel of all universities nationwide to clarify the implications of complying with the federal government’s request to provide names and nationalities of students – a part of the Title VI investigations launched into 51 institutions of higher education on March 14.

“We write to you to clarify some of the legal implications of complying with the federal government’s request to provide the personally identifiable information of students and faculty, to make clear that you are under no legal compulsion to comply with such a request, and to strongly urge you not to comply, given the serious risks and harms of doing so,” AAUP counsel members said in the April 2 letter.

The AAUP is a non-profit headquartered in Washington D.C. that advocates for professors and

students on campuses nationwide.

The organization sets standards and procedures for universities regarding relations with faculty members, which the university itself has adopted.

The letter notes that multiple schools and universities in Denton County and across the nation have “taken steps” to support international and immigrant students on their campus and urges the University of North Texas administration to do the same.

According to the Associated Press, universities across the country have asked Homeland Security what prompted the student visa revocations and emphasized travel precautions, such as carrying their passports and immigration documents with them.

The letter includes a list of nine demands from the AAUP for university administration to consider, such as ensuring international students remain enrolled and given the opportunity to complete their degrees remotely in the event of a visa revocation, checking SEVIS daily and communicating information to students.

The second item of consideration asks the university administration to share “specific grounds for visa revocation” by disclosing the sections in the Immigration and Naturalization Code on which the revocations are based while not revealing the affected students’ names.

The letter also mentioned the DOJ’s investigation into the university for alleged antisemitism, stating the members were worried students may be targeted for protesting against the federal government.

“UNT students currently do not feel protected on campus, and have already been deliberately skipping in-person classes and other campus events because of the current lack of transparency regarding UNT administrative and policy and practice on these matters,” the members said in the letter.

**Editor’s note: This article was originally published online and has been updated for clarity.**



The University of North Texas’ American Association of University Professors chapter sent a letter to President Keller and university administration on April 12, 2025, advising them to respond to 27 student visas revocations. Photo by Tyler Quisenberry



# Denton Planning and Zoning Commission recommends denial of 195 development rezoning after resident opposition

By Andrea Olan  
Staff Writer

The Denton Planning and Zoning Commission unanimously recommended the denial of a proposed rezoning for the Denton 195 development near Interstate 35 West and Corbin Road.

Eight residents spoke during the April 9 hearing. Speakers raised concerns about how the existing infrastructure could not support additional development. Kyle Eaton, president of the Denton Neighborhood Association and Denton resident, said Corbin Road, the primary access point to the site, is a gravel road that lacks drainage systems and often becomes impassable during heavy rain.

“I can tell you June second of last year, we got an inch and a half of [rain],” Eaton said. “I went out, there was 10 inches of water on Corbin Road in a place that was not marked on the floodplain.”

The 5-0 decision followed over two hours of citizen comments at City Hall. Although city staff recommended approval, commissioners raised concerns about infrastructure and floodplain development. McAdams submitted the application on behalf of Denton 195 Partners, LLC.

The proposal would have changed the zoning from Residential 2 to an Overlay Planned Development with Mixed-Use Neighborhood and Public Facilities. This type of zoning allows for a customized mix of housing, such as apartments and townhomes, along with areas set aside for public use like parks or open space.

In a Facebook post, Eaton criticized the developer for submitting significant plan changes just days before the Planning and Zoning meeting, limiting residents’ ability to review the updated proposal.



Members of the Denton Planning and Zoning Commission meet in the City Council Work session Room on April 9, 2025. Photo by Caitlin Goodsell

Eaton also said there are concerns about drainage, flooding and the ability of Corbin Road to handle the added traffic from new development without major upgrades.

Randi Rivera, director of planning and entitlement for McAdams, said during the meeting that Corbin Road improvements would need to be completed before residential building permits could be issued. She added that I-35W frontage road construction is expected to begin in 2030, based on information from the Texas Department of Transportation.

“We want to make sure that infrastructure is in before people are living in these homes,” Rivera said. “That was a commitment that we made earlier this year.”

McAdams representatives held four neighborhood meetings between 2022 and 2025 to gather community feedback. Under the proposed plan, the development would cluster new housing on about 44 acres of buildable land while dedicating over half of the total 195 acres, much of it floodplain, as open space. City planning documents indicated that the total unit count would still be based on the entire acreage, including the floodplain area.

Commissioner Clay Riggs said he had concerns about how the density was being calculated.

“More than half of the property is going to be dedicated to the city, but we’re also allowing that to be added into the density that they can build on in their lots,” Riggs said. “I kind of have a hard time with that.”

Commissioner Lisa Dyer said the Denton 195 development has a long-term impact on the community, such as the new developments not being “compatible” with the area.

“We are not anti-growth. Growth has to be responsible and sustainable,” Dyer said. “We have to think about what the long-term impact to the city is going to be.”

Chris Watts, a denton resident

and former mayor said the project was premature and dependent on unresolved agreements with the city.

“The whole thing is predicated on the City of Denton accepting 130 acres of floodplain for park dedication,” Watts said. “At the least, there needs to be some more of an indication that the city is going to be OK with this.”

City staff recommended approval, saying the project was consistent with Denton’s 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which encourages residential growth near major highways like I-35W.

Angie Manglaris, the city’s Development Review Manager, said approving the Planned Development would allow greater control over its design and ensure that regulations specific to the site are met before permits are issued.

City Council member Brian Beck said that with the number of objections raised, the project faces significant challenges moving forward.

“There’s a lot of information stacking up against them at the moment,” Beck said. “When you see a neighborhood group meet the protest threshold and you have a Planning and Zoning Commission vote for denial, it adds up.”

The commission’s recommendation will move to the Denton City Council for a final decision. A council hearing is scheduled for May 6.

Due to more than 20 percent of nearby property owners formally protesting the rezoning, six of seven council members must vote in favor for it to pass, according to Texas law.

According to an information sheet, if the rezoning request is denied, the property would remain zoned Residential 2, allowing the landowner to build large-lot, single-family homes under current city regulations.



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## ‘The Office’ star Leslie David Baker inspires students at university’s Fine Arts Series event

**BAKER** continued from page 3

saying that she attended the event to learn more about Baker’s career and his insights.

“When we got here, we saw the signs around campus, and I’m like, okay, that’s a familiar face, I’m down with that—favorite show, pretty cool,” Rodriguez said. “Being in the front row made it feel so real. It was like Stanley himself was right there talking to us.”

Baker spoke about the unpredictability of life, saying that things do not always go as planned, but it is a part of the journey. He shared that he never imagined being an actor when he was growing up.

He also emphasized the importance of following one’s passion, regardless of the obstacles.

“Life doesn’t always go in the direction you want it to,” Bermudez said. “Sometimes it zags in a different direction, and you have to keep pushing forward.” That really stuck with me because it reminded me that things don’t always go as planned, but you have to keep going.”

Rodriguez said Baker’s honesty and humor inspired her as he shared stories from behind the scenes of “The Office” and offered advice on navigating life and career paths.

“One of the biggest things he said was that there’s no single, right path in life,” Rodriguez said. “You can try different things and find what works for you. That advice was so important



Actor Leslie David Baker laughs during his talk for UNT’s Distinguished Lecture Series on April 9, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

to me because, as a student, I’m still figuring out my direction in life.”

Freshman criminal justice major Bailey Carter had the opportunity to ask Baker a question regarding whether Hudson was Baker’s favorite character to play throughout his career.

“At first, I wasn’t really freaking out or anything, but when he started answering questions, I thought, ‘I can just talk to him like anyone else,’” Carter said. “It felt

like he was just a regular guy who happened to be in the public eye.”

Carter was struck by Baker’s straightforwardness during the event, particularly his advice for students.

“He said, ‘Just go out and do it,’” Carter said. “Whether it’s acting or something else, he didn’t wait for permission to try new things. That really inspired me.”

For many students, meeting Baker was an opportunity to

reflect on their own ambitions and career paths. The evening, which was both entertaining and thought-provoking, left a lasting impression on those in attendance, like Bermudez.

“Honestly, seeing him talk in person was such a cool experience,” Bermudez said. “It was a reminder that no matter where you come from or what your background is, you can always make something of yourself.”

## Things To Do:

### NecroPROMoicon 3: Denton’s Original Goth Prom Returns

**When:** Saturday, April 19, 9 p.m.  
**Where:** Harvest House, 331 E Hickory St.  
**What:** Denton’s original goth prom returns to Harvest House on the patio. Classic Goth and Darkwave, EBM, Darkstep and Industrial music will play until the last call. There will also be an onsite contest for gender nonspecific prom court, as well as vendors selling art.

### Denton 420 Fest

**When:** Sunday, April 20, 1-5 p.m.  
**Where:** Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios, 411 E. Sycamore St.  
**What:** 420 Fest is a free to attend event at Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studios featuring a local art mart, vendors, food truck and live music. Live performances from bands include Vail, Hex Bomb-omb and Brotherhood. There will also be a fundraiser benefiting the Community Hunger Initiative.

### Thin Line Fest Campus Theater Kick-Off

**When:** Wednesday, April 23, 6:30 p.m.  
**Where:** Campus Theater, 214 W. Hickory St.  
**What:** Thin Line Fest is the longest running documentary film festival in Texas that extends over five days. “New Wave” (2024) is a music documentary that explores the 80’s music Vietnamese phenomenon. The festival features music, film and photography and is free to attend but a \$10 donation is suggested. Registry is available online for an entrance pass.

## Freelance filmmaker Cameron Smith launches Denton culture show ‘Lil’ D TV’ to capture uniqueness of the town

**By Rebecca Hsu**  
Staff Writer

Cameron Smith, now a freelance creator and Denton resident, was once put in handcuffs for making a film in a Denton gas station.

Nearly 15 years ago, he and a group of friends were filming a robbery comedy when police thought the scene was a real crime. Officers arrived with guns drawn and arrested them immediately until the

group explained they were filming.

Smith attended the university from 2008 to 2010 and has returned to Denton often over the years for work. Last year, he moved to Denton and recently launched his project “Lil’ D TV,” an online show focusing on the culture, people and community of Denton.

Each episode highlights different scenes in Denton. So far, the show has covered themes such as homelessness, city council candidates, Black history,

local businesses supporting women and more.

“Every episode is made from scratch every month,” Smith said. “We try and think of the most colorful people in Denton and we spotlight those.”

Smith said he started the show partly in response to the many things happening locally and globally and to create new financial opportunities for himself.

Before establishing “Lil’ D TV” in Denton, Smith created a similar show in his hometown of Burleson in 2012, working with a local newspaper and his father, Brad Smith, also a mural artist.

“It was a small town, a little place, and the community just didn’t really get what we were doing,” Cameron Smith said.

Brad Smith added that, back then, people were not as familiar with watching video content online, but now the internet has come a long way. He also credits Denton as being a welcoming place.

“Denton is really — I’d say progressive, and a lot of creative artist types live there, so they’re open to stuff like this,” Brad Smith said.

Cameron Smith described “Lil’ D TV” as hyper-local programming, noting that there are always many things to cover and discuss in the community.

“Denton is really cool because it still has a specific culture,” Cameron Smith said. “There’s so many towns, even like

nice, big towns that have all sorts of amenities, they don’t have any sense of community, culture or pride or anything.”

Among all the content “Lil’ D TV” has made so far, Cameron Smith said he is most proud of the interview with Linnie McAdams, a civil rights leader and the first woman of color elected to the Denton City Council.

“She told us about Quakertown and the history with the Black community [...],” Cameron Smith said. “She’s a fascinating person, and she remembers everybody’s name that she worked with 60 years ago. She’s an amazing person.”

Shaun Treat, a local historian and former communication studies professor at the university, helped set up the interview with McAdams. Treat said it is valuable that the show is both fun and educational.

“I love it just as a great feel-good piece, but he goes to a lot of effort to also use it to educate folks,” Treat said. “So you learn new things.”

Cameron Smith believes “Lil’ D TV” is not only for people living in Denton but also for those outside the city. He draws inspiration from the radio program “This American Life,” which tells stories about local individuals but still draws national attention.

“The stories mean something about humanity, about relatable human issues,”

Cameron Smith said. “You would like to think that it’s interesting just because these people are interesting. It doesn’t matter if you’re in Denton or not.”

Claire Tomiak, a nurse and Cameron Smith’s girlfriend who occasionally helps with the production, said “Lil’ D TV” has been Cameron Smith’s favorite project, and she enjoys seeing the show’s progress.

“It’s a very unique project, given that it does have journalistic aspects as well as really interesting stories about culture,” Tomiak said. “He goes and finds people and highlights them in their beautifulness that otherwise the internet and the world might not see.”

Cameron Smith said that he has received mostly positive feedback from the community. He has also had people asking about advertising and sponsoring.

Cameron Smith’s goal for “Lil’ D TV’s” future is to have an office in the downtown area where he can do interviews, edit and interact with the public. He also said he hopes to make the show a collaborative project.

“I’m trying to make this as transparent and as communal as possible,” Cameron Smith said. “If people have segment ideas, if they have show ideas, if they have people they want me to interview, just tell me, and I’ll try to make it fit at the very least. I mean, I’m trying to make it the voice of the community.”



Founder of “Lil’D TV” Cameron Smith films in the Library Mall on April 4, 2025. **Photo by Mahvish Shah**



## ‘Who Believes in Angels?’ album honors rock ‘n’ roll legends, reflects on artists’ own mortalities

By Sophia Carbajal  
Staff Writer

“Who Believes in Angels?” is a powerful collection that displays the ultimate blend of two of the best modern day queer icons: Elton John and Brandi Carlile. Their unquestionable musical chemistry creates a successful yet unexpected album that reflects on life and confronts death.

Written and recorded over a 20-day period in October 2023, “Who Believes in Angels?” was released on April 4 and includes 10 beautifully composed tracks. “Who Believes in Angels” deservedly hit the top of the Official UK Albums Chart on April 11, marking John’s tenth No. 1 album and Carlile’s first time in the top 40.

According to a statement on his website, John said he wants to lift up Carlile through the album and called her “the greatest female artist in the world.”

The pair’s first song, “The Rose Of Laura Nyro,” begins with strong guitars, perfect harmonies and carefully crafted lyrics that complement each musician’s strengths.

The album’s title track is the highlight of the collection. “Who Believes in Angels?” features soaring lyrical lines from Carlile and is topped with all the elements typical of a John hit.

In the song, John and Carlile confront their own mortality, asking, “What do the angels do with you and I?” The song’s music video description says “Who Believes in Angels?” is a “kaleidoscopic tribute to the rock & roll angels who continue to inspire successive generations.” John and Carlile pay their respects to multiple musicians throughout the album, including Laura Nyro, Little Richard and Tina Turner.

The album effortlessly combines various genres that fit together like pieces in a puzzle. Each song is uniquely

different as the musicians use tempo, style and instruments in ways that progress the listener through the album and toward resolution.

“Little Richard’s Bible” mixes rock ‘n’ roll with blues as John plays ragtime piano lines against brass sounds that unify the different tones of the album.

John and Carlile continue this success in the following track, “Swing For The Fences,” in which they make two voices sound like one through closely-knit harmonies. “The River Man” follows suit but does not quite match the playfulness of “Little Richard’s Bible.”

These playful songs work within the album’s context and are clearly influenced by Carlile’s contemporary country sounds. However, there are pleasant surprises from John, whose recent projects have moved toward pop, like his collaboration with pop star Dua Lipa in “Cold Heart.”

The album’s eighth track, “A Little

Light,” is the least interesting song in the collection. The music is good, but it feels predictable and almost dull compared to the other nine songs’ more complicated arrangements and harmonies.

John and Carlile each have their own individual song to shine on the album, with Carlile’s being the fifth track, “You Without Me” and Elton’s being the finale track, “When This Old World is Done With Me.”

Carlile’s solo “You Without Me” is profoundly personal and represents the artist’s forte. Carlile’s vocals are supported by a lone acoustic guitar, allowing the musician’s raw emotion to be the focus. “You Without Me” forces listeners to slow down, a change from the previous four upbeat tracks.

The album ends with a piano ballad reminiscent of an Elton classic. Having played music for over half a century, John sings a love letter to himself in his solo “When This Old World is Done With Me.”

This song seems to reflect a high point in the 78-year-old’s career and examines not only the end of his career but also his life.

Singing over piano chords, John says, “scatter me among the stars” and “release me to the tide,” lyrics that call the world to remember the musician’s world-changing musical career upon his death.

Though the meanings behind “Who Believes in Angels?” are deeply complex, the themes do not overwhelm the listener or take away from the musical elements throughout the album.

“Who Believes in Angels?” is a successful addition to John and Carlile’s careers and an accurate record of what these musicians can accomplish.

Sophia’s rating: 4.5/5

### Icon of the Week:

Brandi Carlile



Credit Library of Congress  
Life

The *Daily’s* icon of the week is 43-year-old American singer and songwriter Brandi Carlile.

Officially starting in 2004 with a Columbia Records contract, her career started with performances in Seattle music clubs. She released her first album titled “Brandi Carlile” in 2005 with tracks she recorded prior to her contract with Columbia Records.

The album received recognition, offering Carlile to be featured on Rolling Stone’s “10 Artists to Watch in 2005” list and featured in Interview and Paste Magazine.

Her most claimed breakthrough moment came from her 2007 album “The Story” and its title track which gave her instant recognition throughout the mid-2000s.

The artist has secured 11 Grammy Awards, two Emmy Awards and an Oscar nomination so far in her 20 year career.

Most recently, she collaborated with British rock singer Elton John for their studio album “Who Believes in Angels?” released on April 4.

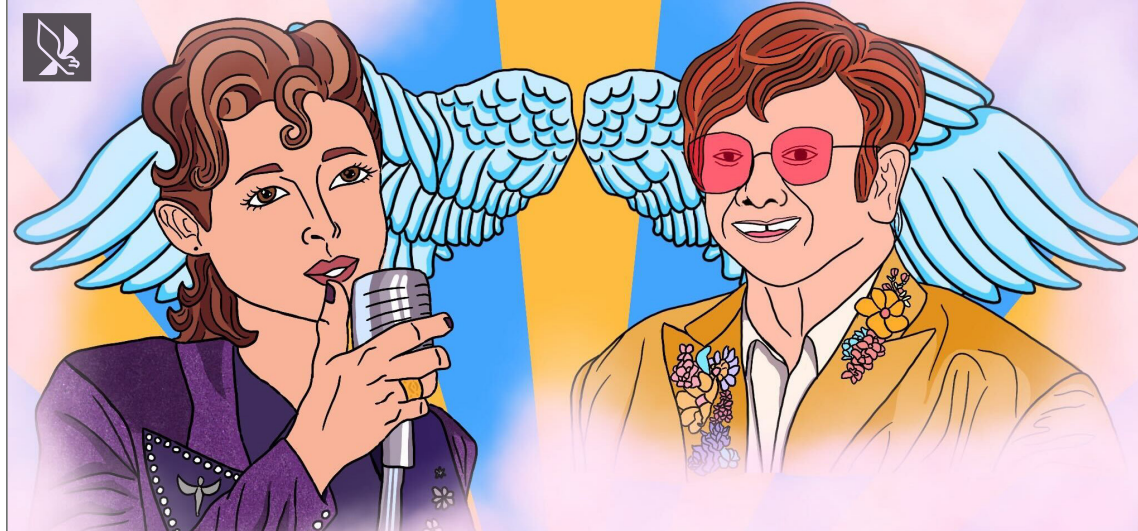


Illustration by Ashton Davis

## ‘Marvel Rivals’ loses momentum in season 2 installment

By Jessica Heinzman  
Staff Writer

In just a few short months since its launch in December 2024, “Marvel Rivals” has become one of the most-played hero shooter games. With a focus on already well-known and beloved characters from the Marvel comics, it is no wonder the game is one of the most talked about third-party shooters in recent times, as it is enticing to Marvel fans and beyond.

With “Marvel Rivals” season two, the Hellfire Gala update, which went live on April 11, the player base is the most active it has been since season one. Inspired by the 2021 “X-Men” comic series, the update brings new hero outfits, a fresh environment and more beloved Marvel characters.

“Marvel Rivals” continues to capture the hearts of Marvel fans with this new update. However, it fails to measure up content-wise compared to previous big updates in the game. Only two new heroes/villains joined the roster during season two, as opposed to the entirety of the Fantastic Four team joining last season.

Included in this update were three new team-up abilities, allowing players to become stronger through character synergy. The most notable of the new abilities is the Mental Projection team-up, including the new character Emma Frost. By having her on the same team as Magneto or Psylocke, her health increases while giving these two teammates access to new abilities.

This update’s size is questionable compared to Season one, especially when considering

the Hellfire Gala itself. Hosted by Frost and mimicking the real-life Met Gala, the Hellfire Gala became a yearly X-Men comic event between 2021 and 2023. This exclusive invite-only event acted as the biggest mutant celebration in the Marvel comic universe.

In “Marvel Rivals,” a Vanguard hero is a frontline tank built to take hits, protect teammates and control the battlefield. In the first half of the second season’s update, the roster of heroes is expanded to include telepath Frost as a Vanguard hero who utilizes a diamond-based form to unleash powerful abilities she does not have in her standard form.

This dynamic switch between her near-indestructible diamond form and telepathic abilities shows attention to detail in designing her skill set. “Marvel Rivals” pays proper homage to her comic book self by allowing her different powers to shine.

It did not go unnoticed that Frost’s default design uses the same color scheme as two other heroes in “Marvel Rivals.” Characters Invisible Woman and Dagger both have the same white with blue accents color scheme that Frost was designed with. This oversight may fade as more heroes are added, but it is still a questionable early design choice.

In the comics, Frost rarely wears an outfit designed to have more than one color on it. The single color palate may be considered too simple for a hero shooter, but it is not blue when she has an accent color. Her all-white outfits earned her the nickname the White Queen, but they were gold when she had color accents.

The “Marvel Rivals” developers could have avoided the current same-color schemes by using golden accents. This may be a small problem, given the access to costumes and a large cast of characters, but it feels lazy in this update. When Frost is a highlight in the first half of this season, the oversight of the same color scheme hurts worse.

Frost is the biggest highlight of this update. The new map is good but does not grab attention as a new character to play would. Having repeat color schemes to this extent is a glaring flaw for games that thrive from their new character drops. It is a flaw that thicker thighs on one of the

characters will not fix forever.

Overall, this season does not feel like a true season update when looking at the content it brings. If anything, it looks like an off-season where not much is happening while the developers prepare for a bigger season.

Season two feels like a waste of the grand party, so this update was used for inspiration. Hopefully, this does not hint at an off-season every-other-update as a trend, and the developers were just buffering in response to the game’s rapid growth.

Jessica’s rating: 3.5/5

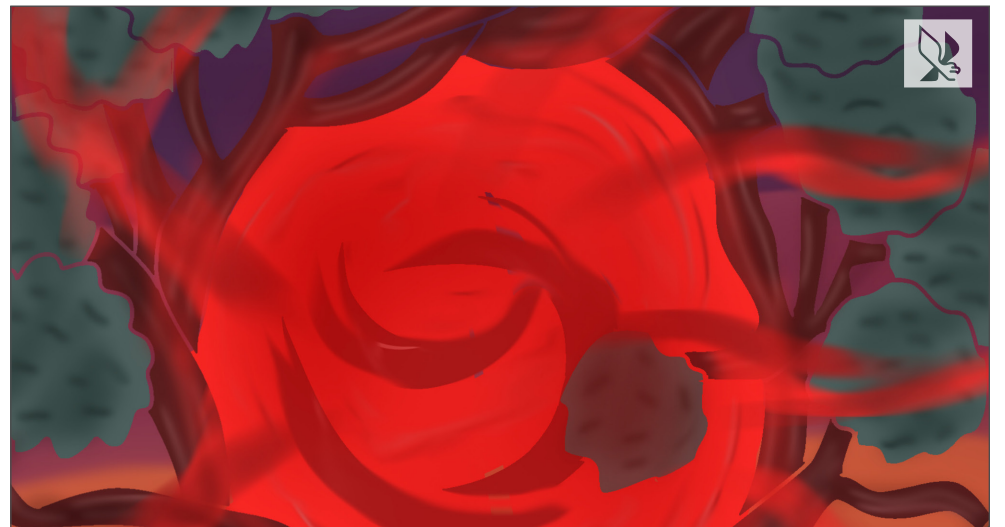


Illustration by Janese Mashell



## North Texas football concludes spring camp with second portal window around the corner



Junior safety Harrison Dempsey participates on a defensive drill during spring camp at the Lovelace & McNatt Families Practice Facility on March 25, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

**FOOTBALL** continued from page 1

with sophomore running back Makenzie McGill, who ended the year with 470 yards on 78 attempts and 10 touchdowns.

“He’s a freshman that’s big, strong and can do it all for us,” Morris said. “I think he’s really gotten comfortable this spring in the offense and the calls and the pass protection.”

Within in the same room, Morris gave the title of “huge surprise” to running back Ashton Gray.

“He’s grown an inch, and he’s put on a ton of

weight, and shoot, I think he’s six-one and [a] half, 215 pounds,” Morris said. “Most phenomenal [running back] in our scrimmage today. A guy that I think if he keeps progressing, we’ll have a good one.”

The collective running back room will be one piece in achieving a goal the program has continued to mention throughout camp—becoming the No. 1 offense in the nation.

This year’s offensive line group will look to maintain a higher level of consistency to achieve this goal as well. Last season, the program rolled out 10 different offensive line combinations, which Morris

called “not a recipe for success.”

While injuries are impossible to predict, the Mean Green added a handful of offensive line transfers, such as senior Virginia transfer offensive lineman Ugonna Nnanna.

Nnanna said the transition to Denton was seamless for him and his fellow offensive linemen.

“We’ve spent so much time together,” Nnanna said. “I feel like I’ve known these boys for, like, two or three years, and I’ve only been here since January.”

On the other side of the ball, one of the team’s largest priorities in this camp period has been installing a new scheme with new defensive coordinator Skyler Cassity. As for how the gelling process has gone with the eight Sam Houston transfers and the Mean Green, senior cornerback David Fisher said buying in has been key to success within the system.

“Anybody can get this defense, it’s very basic,” Fisher said. “You just got to trust the guy next to you, so I’m confident with anybody on the field that they just know their job.”

Fisher, who transferred from Sam Houston said that, on paper, combining the high-flying North Texas offense with Sam Houston’s defense will be successful. Not only does he imagine success in the regular season, Fisher said the team has practiced in the spring with a specific vision in mind — a conference championship and possibly even a spot in the College Football Playoff.

“We’re not shying away from it. We like to speak it into existence,” Fisher said. “It’s there. It’s obtainable. It’s not like a fairy tale that ‘Oh, hopefully one day.’ No this is the team that’s supposed to get the championship.”

## Athlete of the Week:

### Cierra Simon



Credit **Mean Green Sports**

Cierra Simon earned American Athletic Conference Player of the Week honors on April 14 for the second time in her career. Simon posted a .462 batting average in a 2-1 series win against No. 25 Florida Atlantic, recording four runs and three RBIs. Simon is the team’s best hitter this season, leading the team with a .393 batting average, 55 hits — including 11 doubles and four triples — and 41 runs scored. She is also tied for second in RBIs with 32. Alongside the upset series win, Simon clinched a career milestone in becoming the first player in program history with 200 hits, 100 runs scored, 100 RBIs and 50 stolen bases. Simon has recorded a hit in the team’s last 20 games and is the seventh player in school history to have multiple Player of the Week honors, winning one in April last season.

## At a Glance:

### Men’s Golf

North Texas men’s golf will play in the American Athletic Conference Championship from April 21-23 in Sarasota, Florida. Most recently, the team finished eighth at the Aggie Invitational from April 12-13. The Mean Green finished seventh in its annual home meet at the Maridoe Golf Club in Carrollton, Texas from March 31 to April 1. The team’s best finish of the season was at the Vaqueros Intercollegiate from Feb. 2-4, where the Mean Green finished third.

### Soccer

The Mean Green open the American Athletic Conference tournament as the 10th seed and will face seventh seed Tulane on April 17. The tournament runs through April 20 and features all 13 AAC teams. North Texas finished the regular season 11-10, marking its first winning record since the 2018-2019 season. It clinched the winning record in a 4-1 win over Tyler Junior College on April 12. The team beat Tulane 4-1 the last time they faced off on March 23 at the Waranch Tennis Complex.

### Football

North Texas softball (30-14, 12-6 American Athletic Conference) plays its second to last home conference series against UAB (19-23, 8-10 AAC) from April 17-19. The team is coming off a 2-1 series win against No. 25 Florida Atlantic (35-9, 14-4 AAC) and is third in the conference, while UAB is in seventh. The Mean Green take on second place South Florida (33-12-1, 12-5-1 AAC) from April 25-27 in its final home series. The team is half a game behind the Bulls after South Florida tied with Wichita State (21-19-1, 9-8-1 AAC) on March 30.

## Senior outfielder Emma Grahmann emerges from reserve role in final collegiate softball season

By **Ian Pfaffenberger**  
Staff Writer

Clouds cover the daytime sky as the wind blows above the Collins Family Softball Complex in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Senior outfielder Emma Grahmann stands in the batter’s box in a 1-2 count. After she and her teammates worked on hitting changeups all week, she said she was prepared to mash any inside pitch she received.

On the next pitch, she turned on a changeup and drove it over the left-field fence for her first career home run.

Prior to her first home run, Grahmann served the North Texas softball team as a substitute and pinch runner for three years. Instead, she prioritized using a bubbly personality to support her teammates. She earned her big break in this season, earning a starting role in the outfield and posting a .333 batting average along with a 1.033 OPS.

“I think I’ve always been ready [...],” Grahmann said. “I think kind of having that mindset of ‘I have nothing to lose’ has kind of allowed me to relax and take the opportunities one-by-one and get the best out of whatever situation I’m given.”

Hailed as “Queen Emma” by her teammates, Grahmann’s energetic personality has established her as a pillar of the team’s culture.

“She always shows up to the field with a good attitude and good personality,” senior pitcher Skylar Savage said. “She’s a great leader for the younger girls to look up to, especially just because she’s seen so much and taught the team so much.”

Those same leadership skills propelled her into an opportunity to finally start multiple games for the Mean

Green. At the beginning of the season, the program rotated players in and out of the corner outfield positions, depending on which players produced the most. Following some hitting inconsistencies at the position, assistant coach Katie Clark told Grahmann that she would be starting in the outfield for the team’s match against UTA on March 19.

“I can’t really say no because I just wanted to play [...],” Grahmann said. “[Head coach Rodney DeLong] came and reassured me and said I was going to start the game no matter what.”

Grahmann went 1-for-3 against the Mavericks, which kept her in the starting lineup in the team’s conference series against Memphis. There, she went 2-for-2 in the series opener, marking the first multi-hit game of her career, with her first career triple quickly following.

“The triple was definitely like, ‘Why hasn’t the ball gotten in yet?’ because I felt like I was running very slow,” Grahmann said. “Coach DeLong sent me to third, and when I got in there standing, I was more surprised that the ball hadn’t been thrown in yet.”

She carried her momentum into the following week for the team’s matches against then-No. 4 Texas A&M and conference rival Tulsa. She collected hits in each of the team’s four games and went 6-for-8 at the dish with five walks, recording her first career home run in the series opener against the Golden Hurricane.

“I just told myself during that moment, ‘Be ready for the inside, get your hands there and foul off what you can,’” Grahmann said. “I just had a good series. I was seeing the ball really well that weekend.”

After reaching base in 12 of 14 plate appearances during the week, Grahmann

earned the first weekly conference award of her career: an American Athletic Conference Honorable Mention.

Despite achieving another career milestone, Grahmann said she was not aware she had won the award until she was texted by her team and getting tagged in a post on X.

“I think coach [Maribeth Gorsuch] or one of the girls texted me, ‘Congrats, so proud of you,’” Grahmann said. “And I’m like, ‘Oh thanks, I know I had a good weekend.’ I had no idea.”

Despite Grahmann’s success as a starter, she has always been lauded by DeLong and her teammates for being a team player, whether she begins the game on the field or on the bench.

“That kid has been an unbelievable teammate and player to coach for the last three years,” DeLong said. “Never complains, never questions anything we do, so [her success] couldn’t happen for a better person.”

Grahmann said that simply being grateful for the opportunity to play Division I softball has kept her going

throughout her career.

A big proponent of her gratitude was watching her sister and former North Texas softball player, Camille Grahmann, have her senior season with the Mean Green cut short due to COVID-19.

“My dad always tells me, ‘You never know when it’s gonna be your last at-bat [...],’” Grahmann said. “He kind of tries to say that, ‘You have to look at the positive side,’ like, at least I got to swing a bat because there are people who don’t do that.”

Now in her final season with North Texas, Emma Grahmann has continued her tradition of a team-first attitude, helping the Mean Green vault into second place in the AAC at the time of writing.

“That’s kind of been my motivation of being positive and really trying to impact the team,” Grahmann said. “[I was] trying to show people that you can impact a team without actually playing and you can impact people’s lives by being a good human.”



Senior outfielder Emma Grahmann practices her swing at Lovelace Stadium on April 14, 2025. **Photo by Tyler Quisenberry**





1.) Photo by Katie Brackens. 2.) Photo by Ismael Beltran. 3, 4, 5.) Photos by Tyler Quisenberry. 6.) Photo by Ismael Beltran.



# Megachurches commercialize religion, promote beliefs for profit

By **Alejandra Osegueda**  
Columnist

Megachurches are prominent within America's distinct religious landscape, but these giant congregations are exploitative in their pursuit of members, propelling themselves toward monetary profit above genuine spirituality.

Named for their larger congregation size, megachurches are known to be either Protestant, Evangelical or Non-Denominational churches with at least 2,000 members. Texas alone has over 200 megachurches, with Gateway and Lakewood being two of the most widely recognized ones, according to The Dallas Morning News.

This category of churches is also defined by charismatic religious leaders acting like social media influencers or celebrities, utilizing their relatability to attract more congregants.

Along with being akin to celebrities, religious leaders at these kinds of churches are also similar to CEOs. They prioritize attendance and donation numbers, primarily focusing on marketing and maintaining revenue streams.

"The kind of person that starts a church that ends up being a megachurch is probably... more of an entrepreneur," said Dave Ferguson, lead pastor at the megachurch Community Christian, in an interview with NPR.

Megachurch worship services are

typically formatted to have social function-like aspects such as hosting Christian rock concerts equipped with high-quality sound systems. They also create plenty of recreational events for their followers to attend and encourage them to bring possible new members to recruit.

The heavy emphasis on cultivating specifically religious social events is rooted in a strategic recruitment drive to gain and maintain the congregations' large scale – ensuring a steady flow of tithes and donations.

According to the Hartford Institute, 96 percent of a megachurch's income comes directly from participant contributions. The average annual salary of a lead pastor from these megachurches is \$147,000, as opposed to the average pastor's salary of around \$48,000.

Megachurches are often run like businesses or corporations, with average annual budgets of over 5 million and at least 50 full-time staffers. According to National Geographic, they also typically utilize marketing, branding, and outreach techniques that Fortune 500 companies use for recruitment.

Due to the corporate angle these churches take, the influx of profit from these houses of worship leads to an accumulation of wealth landing in the hands of a few individuals – such as the church's pastors or religious leaders.

Megachurch religious leaders are regularly seen wearing expensive luxury clothing, like Seattle Pastor Judah Smith, who was spotted

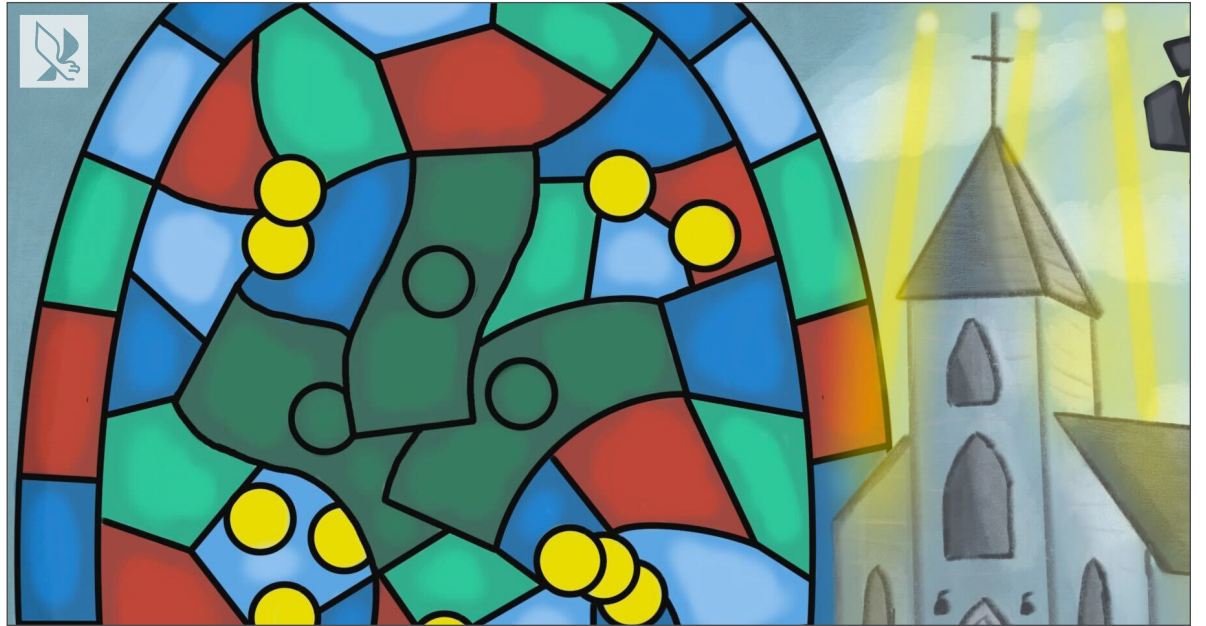


Illustration by Bella DuBose

wearing a \$3,600 Gucci jacket, or T.D. Jakes, a Dallas-based pastor who had on a \$1,250 Louboutin fanny pack.

The popularity of megachurch pastors to this degree became so commonplace that an Instagram account, aptly named @PreachersNSneakers, was created to track the designer sneakers they have been seen wearing.

"I began asking, how much is too much?" said Ben Kirby, creator of the PreacherNSneakers Instagram account, in an interview with the Washington Post. "Is it okay to get rich off of preaching about Jesus? Is it okay to be making twice as

much as the median income of your congregation?"

Designer clothes are not the only things these pastors purchase with their hefty paychecks. John Gray, the pastor of Relentless Church in South Carolina, faced a publicity scandal after purchasing a \$200,000 Lamborghini SUV for his wife, according to CNN.

There should be more community reinvestment instead of allowing these megachurches to profit from the massive tithes and donations of their attendees. Donations to the church should be invested back into the hands of the congregants instead of lining the pastors' pockets for the

latest Balenciaga drop.

More financial transparency on where a church's tithes go should be standardized within these churches. The attendees should have a say in where their donations go by being able to vote on new mission projects, community initiatives or church repairs.

Megachurches need to reevaluate how they invest the wealth of their community and consider the example they set, not just for their congregants but also for the broader role of megachurches being a religious first institution – not a money-centric one.

# Defunding DART would derail Dallas' future development

By **Cooper Collins**  
Staff Writer

Dallas Area Rapid Transit, also known as DART, is one of Texas's biggest public transit agencies. The system serves as a lifeline to underserved communities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area that may be unable to afford other modes of transportation.

However, in the last year, DART has come under threat. Some member cities expressed interest in cutting the amount of funding they give to DART, putting the economic impact that DART has on North Texas and potential plans for expansion in jeopardy.

The Plano City Council passed a motion in

June 2024 supporting the lowering of its one-cent sales contribution to the agency by 25 percent. The one-cent sales tax adds one penny to every dollar spent on a taxable item.

Since the passing, other cities such as Farmers Branch, Irving and Carrollton have passed similar resolutions calling for a decrease in the tax rate. Legislation has even been proposed in the Texas House and Senate to force DART to decrease the tax rate.

Plano Mayor John Muns said his reason for supporting the resolution is fiscal.

"We can't afford to continue to be a part of DART at the full penny and getting the service that we're getting," Muns said. "It's just—it's

not going to work."

Muns also referenced a report commissioned by the state legislature that found that Plano contributes roughly \$109 million to DART while only receiving \$44 million in services.

This does not paint a full picture of the story. The amount of services that DART provides to the North Dallas suburbs is not currently fully effective. This can change within the next couple of years with the opening of the DART Silver Line.

The DART Silver Line is an upcoming commuter rail line that cuts through the north Dallas Suburbs of Plano, Richardson, Addison, Carrollton and Coppell. It connects all these suburbs to terminal B in the DFW International Airport.

With the arrival of this new line, economic growth and new tax revenue are expected. A report by the university's economics research group found that the total economic impact of the DART light system from 2019 to 2021 was \$1.8 billion for the DFW economy.

A similar project in neighboring Tarrant County—TEXRail—also made its own fair share of economic impact in the region. Sales tax revenue has grown nearly 40 percent for businesses within a five-minute walk to TEXRail's Grapevine/Main Street Station. Sales tax revenue has increased more than 30 percent within a 10-minute walk, according to a report by Trinity Metro.

However, more is at stake than lost tax revenue and business profits. In 2026, North Texas will host more FIFA World Cup

matches than any other city. Micheal Morris, the head of the North Texas Council of Governments transportation department, said the matches were scheduled because of his bus transportation plan for North Texas.

"We think we have nine events because they must have liked the stadium, the region, the hotels and, I think, the transportation plan," Morris said to KERA News. "They quickly realized how comprehensive this particular vision is, which I think is what sort of blew them away."

Morris discussed how the threat of a sales tax reduction could impact the transit plan in a special meeting with the DART board of directors.

"Our transit plan is at risk if anything happens between now and the delivery of that 18 months from now, which could have significant consequences to the commitments we've made for that particular plan moving forward," Morris said.

Regardless of soccer and economics, DFW voters should consider the most vulnerable in our society who consistently use DART and how they would be affected. According to their website, DART services move more than 220,000 passengers per day.

"If DART funding is slashed, I and so many others will be left stranded," Plano resident Saya Clarke said to KERA News. "I can't afford a car, and even if I could, our highways are already overcrowded death traps."

North Texas needs DART. Cutting its funding would be a disaster, as many rely on it to move around the metroplex.



Illustration by Janese Mashell